

“ THE PECK PERSPECTIVE ”

(From the Capitol)

April 3, 2023

Last week, the Legislature made significant progress towards completing our work for the 2023 session. In the Senate, we debated and voted on over 70 bills covering a myriad of topics from the length of trains to upholding a culture of life. This week the attention will turn toward Conference Committee Reports – the final step in getting most bills approved and sent to the governor.

Of course, 70 bills are far too many for me to write about in one setting, so I’ve selected just a few. Other bills will be written about in future weeks.

Reducing Smoking By Young Adults: One of the bills passed last week, HB 2269, will raise the age to purchase and possess tobacco products, including electronic cigarettes, to age 21. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there are 17,142 Kansas smokers aged 18–20, which represents 4.74 percent of all adult smokers. The sale of cigarettes provides Kansas with annual excise and sales tax revenue of around \$147 million, passage of HB 2269 is estimated to reduce state revenue by \$7.5 million. After much thought, I voted yes to HB 2269, which helped it pass the Senate 28–11. Since it had previously passed the House 68–53, HB 2269 is now headed to the Governor’s desk for her consideration.

Presidential Primary: Another bill that passed the Senate last week, HB 2053, will provide for a presidential preference primary in Kansas, for the two major political parties, on March 19, 2024. A candidate wishing to be on the ballot must pay a \$10,000 fee to the Secretary of State or file a petition, signed by no less than 5 percent of the registered voters of their political party, at least 60 days prior to the election date. HB 2053 passed 28–12 and will now go to a conference committee to see if the House agrees to the Senate changes in HB 2053. Although I understand the argument in favor of a presidential preference primary, I voted no. The \$5 million price tag to the State is too much for me.

Working to Help Control Property Tax Increases: Rising to the top of the many issues legislators regularly hear from voters about has to be property taxes. The property tax issue was amplified last month when property owners received their valuation notices from county appraisers’ offices. Over the past few weeks, legislators have heard many times of valuation increases that exceed 20 percent, with some homeowners communicating increases of over 30 percent. To put those percentages in numbers: a home valued at \$150,000 in 2022 was appraised at \$180,000 (20%) or \$195,000 (30%) respectively in 2023.

As a way to give more control to property owners, the Senate Tax Committee pushed SCR 1610 to the Senate floor for debate and vote. Passage of SCR 1610 would allow voters to consider amending the Kansas Constitution to limit valuation increases to

three percent per year. Exceptions to the three percent limit would include new construction, like a new room or deck, the legal description of the parcel changes, a change in classification of the property (like agriculture to residential), or a change in ownership of the property.

Passage of the resolution would not necessarily reduce property taxes, but several senators saw it as creating more transparency in the process. In the end, SCR 1610 failed to receive the two-thirds (27) votes needed for passage. The vote was a bipartisan 26–14; with five republicans voting no. I voted yes.

Continuing the Effort to Protect Female Students: The Senate passed HB 2138 by a vote of 29–11. The bill requires each school district board of education to adopt a policy requiring separate overnight accommodations, during school sponsored travel that requires an overnight stay, be provided for students according to their gender-at-birth. The legislation would also protect any student who reports a violation of the policy from retaliation by school personnel. The 29 yes votes included one brave democrat. And, of course, I voted yes.

I find it disturbing that any person would find it acceptable for a school district to allow unmarried high school students, of different biological sexes, to spend the night in the same motel room. I'm confident that most, if not all, SEK school districts would not provide or allow such accommodations.

Stay Current on Child Support or No Food Stamps: The final bill I'll mention is HB 2141, a bill to require a parent making child support payments, subject to a court order, to be disqualified from receiving "food assistance benefits" (taxpayer funded food stamps) if they fail to make the support payments. Seems like common sense legislation – if you're not providing for your children, why should taxpayers provide for you?

HB 2141 passed the House 76–46 in February but it didn't receive sufficient support in the Senate for passage. The vote was 20–20. I voted yes. The constitutional majority for passage of legislation in the Senate is 21 votes in the affirmative.

Until next time, may the blessings of God be yours.

Virgil Peck
State Senator